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ABSTRACT

Analysis of the difference between male-centered and female-centered electronic discourse communities identifies patterns which may exclude or privilege individual females. This paper characterizes female-centered electronic dialogue through studying the roles of Sarah and Rachel, women in two separate sections of first-year English who became the central figures in each class's listserv; male-centered dialogue is represented by Josh and Kelsey who dominated the third class section. Each class exhibited a different pattern: (1) Sarah led a supportive but subjective interchange; (2) Rachel centered a lively, idealistic, often confrontational exchange; and (3) Josh and Kelsey reduced the intellectual level of the electronic conversations through sarcasm and insults. Their aggressive, male interaction negatively affected the quality of listserv discourse. Clear gender distinctions are apparent when samples are studied from the three classes; his/stories differ from her/stories. Through analysis of sample electronic entries from all three sections, tabulation of number and length of male and female responses, and comparison of grades for the listserv assignment, the paper shows how the males' "one-up" behavior had a negative impact on the electronic conversation. Contains 6 references; a listserv posting is attached. (Author/RS)

Discourses of Power:
Feminine Centers of Electronic Discourse Communities

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ABSTRACT

Discourses of Power: The Feminine Centers of Electronic Discourse Communities

Analysis of the difference between male-centered and female-centered electronic discourse communities identifies patterns which may exclude or privilege individual females.

This paper presented at 1999's NCTE characterizes female-centered electronic dialogue through studying the roles of Sarah and Rachel, women in two separate sections of first-year English who became the central figures in each class's listserv; male-centered dialogue is represented by Josh and Kelsey who dominated the third class section. Each class exhibited a different pattern: 1) Sarah led a supportive but subjective interchange; 2) Rachel centered a lively, idealistic, often confrontational exchange; and 3) Josh and Kelsey reduced the intellectual level of the electronic conversations through sarcasm and insults. Their aggressive, male interaction negatively affected the quality of listserv discourse. Clear gender distinctions are apparent when samples are studied from the three classes; his/stories differ from her/stories.

Through analysis of sample electronic entries from all three sections, tabulation of number and length of male and female responses, and comparison of grades for the listserv assignment, the speaker will show how the males' one-up behavior had a negative impact on the electronic conversation.

Discourses of Power:
Feminine Centers of Electronic Discourse Communities

Lemon-L
Lemon-L, Lemon-L
What should I write?
Oh, what the hell.
Of a dream?
One of my songs?
Time and love?
Pings and pongs?
Lemon-L, Oh, Lemon-L
Should I write what I really think?
Oh, what the hell.
by Rachel

When I first substituted Lemon-L, an electronic listserv, very timidly and experimentally in place of the more traditional journal in my first-year composition class, I never expected the changes that would occur. I agree with Michael Spitzer that this computer-mediated language gives us a form, "more extemporaneous than writing and more carefully planned than speech" (193). It has sometimes allowed students who would previously have gone through the semester totally unknown by their classmates (except to a few in small group activities) to predominate in this new electronic community. Lemon-L (for Lemon-List) has also caused striking problems since students discuss topics and say things in this electronic medium they would not say face-to-face. Since my first racist explosion over affirmative action in the fall of 1994, I have studied this student discourse as an additional way to understand my students and the dynamics in the class, focusing mostly on gender distinctions.

This asynchronous listserv was created as a way for students to respond to required prompts about class readings and current essays and as a free space to talk to each other. Three entries a week for twelve weeks (36) guarantees a C; last semester one student, Keith, wrote 242 entries. Rather than my reading individual responses and reflection in a journal all curled up in my easy chair at home, the students create a discourse community, responding sometimes to the same prompt in the computer lab but most frequently as they will and to each other outside of class making their reflections available for everyone to see. Rather than my skimming through 7,000 to 12,000 word journals over Thanksgiving break, realizing at the end of the semester what wonderful epiphanies have occurred in the students' writing, wondering how this insightful person could have written such dull papers all semester, and then handing these incredibly rich writings back to the students, the students create electronic writing which reveals much the same thing all semester long and can be saved and revisited time and time again. The amount of material is overwhelming; my electronic files right now are a little like my closets at home, filled with items that I still want but probably will not have time to use again. I have saved Rachel's and Sarah's and Josh's and Kelsey's files, but have had to clean my closet at the beginning of every semester to make way for the new classes.

Unlike Faigley and others who entered into the discussion, my way of responding is usually in general comments at the beginning of each class session on what I've read on the list. I never felt comfortable commenting in their journals either, but used a cover sheet for my comments, so their journals remained intact. I have tried to make Lemon-L theirs and not mine (even though I ask for certain topics regularly as I would have done with a journal). The following exchange shows how the students come to know each other through their electronic writings but not in class.¹

Dawn: Is it not funny that we really don't know each other by faces and just by our writing? You would think that after all this talking to each other we would know everyone really well. But I don't know anyone really well by putting a name with a face.

Keith: I agree. I feel like I know the people that write on this all the time very well but in reality I only know one person in the class by name. Sometimes I think I should just ask who people are, that way I can at least put a face with the person I am writing to. Too bad we didn't have a scanner we could use to e-mail our pictures to each other. Then we could figure out the names and faces of our classmates.

What have my students done with this assignment and how have their entries reflected traditionally acknowledged patterns of male-dominated or female-dominated discourse? Do males dominate? How do females interact? What happens to the class list and the class as a whole when males engage in "ritual combat" as Deborah Tannen puts it?

I will admit that the entries in this article are selective and relate some of the more interesting events rather than the more mundane, body-piercing discussions. The first two examples come from semesters in which I have characterized a single female as the feminine center of the class's electronic community. Kathleen Blake-Yancey challenged me on that characterization in discussions at 1997's CCCC, and she was correct to do so because I was defining the center in two different ways. Although I may not have enough evidence to use "feminine center," I can certainly show the difference between these two class listserv communities where women were more active and/or influential and the male-dominated discourse which predominated in the third class. Sarah centered her class because she had a third again as many entries as any other student in her class although she entered in a more subjective way.

Two papers from the Penn State Conference, Sibylle Gruber's in 1995 and Scott Stevens' in 1997 claimed that greater participation by women occurs in the class listserv than in the traditional classroom. My first example of a feminine-centered listserv was Sarah's; Sarah was

very similar to Gruber's Alma who did not participate in class but was so outspoken in topics in the electronic discussion that students in one classroom exchange turned to look at her and expected her to say something because they knew she had an opinion. Sarah never spoke in my first-semester composition class either, but her voice was the most frequent on the list. She was clearly the center of the dialogue but at the personal or subjective level. Her initial responses could be characterized as Subjective Knowledge; Sarah is using empathy here to share the experience that has led her to her perceptions (Goldberger, et al. 223) Her entries are also typical of women's patterns of conversation which see the individual in a network of connections; conversations are negotiations for closeness (Tannen). She begins tentatively in her September response to Jennifer. Then, in her response to Colleen in October, she offers advice using "I" statements.

Jennifer: The most important thing I learned outside of school would be how to be a good friend. When I was in high school, one of my good friends was in a car accident and he died. My best friend was there for me and I was there for her through that difficult time. I think being a good friend is one of the best qualities you can have.

Sarah: My senior year of high school, I had a lot of close friends die. If you need someone to talk to, feel free to talk to me.

Colleen: I didn't do too well on my bio exam and I am about to give up on everything. I can't though because I just started college and it's hard and I have very hard classes. I need guidance or a push or reassurance or something. My boyfriend always lectures me with my studies but I try and I don't succeed. What should I do? I am going bullisticks with school and I need to get my mind off things, so I'm going to play tennis. Maybe that will relieve my stresses.

Sarah: Colleen, I've always found that to relieve stress, set away an hour or two to do something you really enjoy. I like to play my viola or talk with a good friend. Whenever I do one of those, I come back to my work more alert and happier, and the work usually turns out better.

She added a long "story" titled "All My Fault" (appendix), which is, I believe, based on her

own life experiences. Judging by Sarah's responses in class alone, a teacher might assume that she is in the developmental stage that Goldberger, Clinchy, Belenky and Tarule would classify as *Silent*, those who, because of their past experiences, perceive words as weapons (24). However, studying Sarah's responses to the class listserv reveals her progression to the subjective stage, a way of knowing which was quite common in the study of the way women learn. Subsequently, Sarah offered her abusive relationship and her anorexia narratives to the class for use in their papers:

Sarah: You're really lucky you got out of that potentially abusive relationship. I wasn't so lucky. My first boyfriend (when I was only 14) abused me physically, mentally, and sexually. It took me 7 months before I got him to stop hitting me and stuff. Then he stalked me for quite awhile. He'd leave me messages and stuff that really messed with my head...and they worked. I became very suicidal and anorexic. I was 5' 8" and weighed 85 pounds my sophomore year of high school. I still have eating problems. I never notice when I am hungry, and when I am busy, I just forget to eat. I've been really busy this semester, and I've already lost 25 pounds. I'm trying to fix it, but it's very hard. By the way... if anyone is doing their papers on abuse or rape or anything along those lines, I am very open about what I remember about my experiences and wouldn't mind telling my story for your paper.

The subjective stage characterized in *Women's Ways of Knowing* identified several characteristics that Sarah reveals in the story and in the above entry. Often the women in the Goldberger, Clinchy, Belenky and Tarule study who fit into the subjective way of knowing had suffered abuse of some kind. Sarah wasn't afraid to take a strong position in the electronic discourse based on her subjective knowledge, however; note her response to Zach below. She is using the experiences from her own life to claim that he hasn't had it so tough.

Vicki: Zach, I would appreciate it if you stopped lecturing people about going to bars. When you were our age, you probably wanted to get in the bars also. There is not much else to do around here.

Zach: When I was your age I spent all of my time in the desert, standing post, waiting to get shot. Then for awhile I got to stand amidst the LA riots and watch

the fun. Unfortunately, we had to put an end to it. Even more unfortunate we were not able to go to the bars there either. You are right. I would have rather gone to the bars.

Sarah: Zach, I hope you weren't looking for sympathy, because you're not gonna get it from me. Other people have had rough lives too and aren't bitter about it like you are. When I talk to people about what all has been done to me, most people say they can't believe I haven't killed myself over it. Don't go around thinking that you're the only one in this class who has had a rough life, because I guarantee you that you are not.

Without these electronic interchanges, I would have classified Sarah as silent. Stevens points out, "There is the added liberation of being able to speak without interruption, without intimidation--what are by most accounts rare opportunities for women in the classroom" (11). I can remember hearing Lester Faigley's presentation at the 1989 Miami Teacher as Researcher Conference and thinking, "Why don't you just have these discussions in class?" *I know now that these discussions would never occur in class.* Faigley said then, using a 1988 typed manuscript from Cynthia Selfe, and his own experience that 1) the level of participation is greater; 2) there is increased participation by women (one woman in his class had not talked in class since tenth grade); 3) the communication is more equitable and less inhibited; 4) there is more emphasis on what is said than on who said it; and 5) there is no closure. I agree with all five of these points although several examples have occurred in my classes to provide exceptions to Faigley's fourth point; note especially the discussion of Josh and Kelsey below. Sarah did not speak in my classroom until she took my sophomore class and then not until the seventh week and not before getting red in the face.

In a second first-year English class another female, Rachel, was also more timid in the classroom than on the list, but not silenced as Sarah was. I considered Rachel the center of this electronic community because seven of twenty-two students mentioned her positively in their final evaluation of the list; Jammie's and Smitty's responses were typical:

Jammie: . . . It's always been fun learning new things especially on the computers. I liked being able to talk to everyone across the internet. I enjoyed reading what everyone wrote, especially some of the things that Rachel wrote. I don't remember who said it, but they were right when they said she makes you think.

Smitty: . . . The messages I did try to continue reading were Rachel's. Whatever anyone else may think, I like the way Rachel writes and thinks (though I don't agree with the details sometimes) and just basically find her messages funny/thought-provoking. This is opposed to the normal hum-drum of weather and sports-figure worship.

P. S. If I have offended anyone, I am not particularly sorry at all.

Again, Rachel's entries told all of us so much more about her. However, instead of the dark "story" Sarah told, Rachel wrote poetry about Lemon-L, such as the one in my opening, or the following about chicken feet.

Chicken feet.
Chicken feet.
Nothing tastes quite as sweet.
I love to eat.
Tangy chicken feet.
Yah..Yah..
Oh.. Oh..
They know how to fixem' in Soho,

Yah..Yah..
Oh.. Oh..
Give me a pair and I'm ready to go
Yah.. Yah..
Oh.. Oh..
Chicken.....feet.....

After an editorial attacking minority scholarships appeared in the school paper, the topic of affirmative action became the center of our class's listserv; Rashaad's and Smitty's exchanges were typical. When the males began the confrontational discussion of affirmative action, six of eleven females tried to participate, some at the subjective level, some at the logical, more confrontational level. Michelle's "assholes don't come in colors" sounds very masculine in

nature. The full story of this class is in ERIC ED 402 572. However, in this article, I want to focus on just the ways Rachel entered and tried to mediate.

Rashaad: That is why we need affirmative action, to remind you people what we been through. Sometimes I tend to think if we followed Malcolm X and demanded our respect "by any means necessary," we wouldn't have these problems in the 90's. And another thing is that if we actually got back what the white man owes us like the forty acres and the mule, we wouldn't need affirmative action; we would own our own companies and hire our own black people. And one thing you people should remember is that you can stem the tide, but you cannot stop it because by the year 2000 there will be more women and minorities than there will be white people. By cutting opportunities for us, you will only hurt America.

Smitty: Personally, I have to state the maxim "by any means necessary" scares the hell out of me. The ends never justify the means in a sane world, and any person who starts down that path will quickly find himself on the wrong end of morality and God. Second, had the black man followed through with this policy to its logical conclusion, he would have found himself in the same fate as the Native American. Compared to the Indians former numbers, they have been nearly wiped out by the white man. What does this say about my race? Quite simply that we are prepared to neutralize and/or kill anything that violently endangers us. History has illustrate this for thousands of years.

On a different note, I envy the black culture's unity. My own race, I have found, feel absolutely no loyalty towards one another due to race. My ancestors for thousands of years have been merchants and explorers intent on forwarding their own individual and family goal at the expense of anyone else. I myself am not terribly proud of this fact, but it goes a ways towards explaining things which have happened through history. However, there are now no new frontiers and no new markets to exploit. Where do my people go from here? I think it is obvious that now we must learn from those we have conquered (to a certain extent that is). But before we, all Americans, can learn from each other, the minority groups, the fanatics, and the white majority must stop seeing each other as the enemy.

Rashaad: Poor Smitty. I think you need to take another look at black people because we are definitely not the Native Americans. You know everyone keeps bringing up the fact that this is the 90's and that it is. We are a new breed of the Black Man, and there are just certain things we are not going to put up with the way our forefathers did. A little history lesson for you is that the Americans were losing the Spanish American War, that is until the black military moved in, so if you think we are just going to let anyone conquer us prepare to get f**ked right on up.

Sincerely, Ain't taking no sh*t!

Rashaad: First of all, I am a very good listener; I learn from my experiences as well as the people God has put around me because they are there for a reason,

believe it or not. Part of the problem with people like you is that you don't listen to what people have to say unless it is similar to what you have to say and that is unfair within itself. And for anyone who wants to know, yes, I have experienced racism on this campus. So for you to say that I listen to my friends too much is totally wrong, and if you paid attention in class, you could see by the way I participate in class, I give white more than just a chance, so maybe you just needed something to say over the e-mail. And maybe try to throw something a little more educated my way next time.

Michelle: Do you really believe all white people are this way? If you do, then you are mistaken. I have heard this concept before, coming from whites, though. "I'm not racist, but this black guy did such and such to me, and they are all like that." What about people who have both white and black parents, do they turn on you only part of the time?

This is why racism and stereotypes continue. Because one person of a race pisses off another person from another race, and then all of us are like that because we have the same color of skin.

I know there are differences in races, but to me that has nothing to do with personality, and that is how I determine friends. I don't judge people because of the color of their skin, and please don't do that to me.

A**holes don't come in colors.

Paul: Rashaad, come on now. You give white more than just a chance. I guess we all know who has the problems with racism.

Rashaad: As a matter of fact, Paul, I do have a problem with racism, and maybe if you read a little better than you do, you can see that I gave an example. You stereotype all black people because of what you see on that idiot box.

Smitty: I apologize for my absence; I frequent the e-mail infrequently.

What I have read here this evening has deeply troubled me. My heart is heavy for I fear that it was my own fault that all this hatred came to a head. To begin with, in my first response to Rashaad, I misspoke myself. I said many things, the gist of which is that my race has done many terrible things, that my ancestors were opportunistic and mean. I did not, however, say that I agreed with them. I had thought that this line was intended to be a safe environment to express opinions and to learn from others. I was wrong. Rashaad, I can literally feel your hate and hostility. If I thought it would make anything better, I would offer my own blood for that of your forefathers. I doubt that it would, though. Slavery was in the past, and so were many of the things I spoke of. The past is prologue, and it was a mistake to bring it into the light on my part; I should have foreseen this. The sins of the father cannot be held over the son's head forever. As our classmate, John, said, "Why can't we all be cool?" I don't know, and I fear I will not live long enough to come to an understanding.

I apologize to one and all for the mess I have made of things. History documents what I said originally, BUT WE DON'T LIVE IN HISTORY; we must

all walk a path of our own choosing.
I WILL SPEAK NO MORE OF THIS.

Rachel entered the dialogue on affirmative action as the first female and from a different perspective than everyone else...a Utopian vision. The fact that she knows about utopias indicates an awareness that many of my students do not have. Women at her stage of knowing also want a public voice; they want to communicate the complexities they see in the world. Rachel's way of knowing would fit into the category of Constructed Knowledge (Goldberger, et al. 216).

Rachel: If we are to live with each other in society, we must cooperate with one another. If we are to cooperate with one another, we must trust one another.

In a utopian society ethnic backgrounds are embraced. Different religions co-exist with one another. Sexual orientation is respected.

Utopian societies do exist. Through time maybe earth will catch up with the rest of the galaxy.

Rachel is aware of the importance of context, so here and a later entry she tries to give the class one in which they can discuss the issues: first utopia, then in the following entry as "an intelligent creature from outer space." Her second entry was written after I tried to bring the discussion of affirmative action into the class in a more structured way through the use of a contractualist ethics assignment on the Californian proposition to end preferential hiring and admission to schools. During the first day's discussion, the class argued bitterly over identification of the interest groups; Rachel had followed me out of class down to my office as concerned as I was about what had happened. I encouraged her to use the list to express her impressions.

Rachel: Today's discussion made me sick. This issue hits too close to home to be indifferent while discussing Affirmative Action policies in California. California just seems to be a big experimental playing ground for politicians. The requirement of disconnecting our personal feelings to enable us to complete this assignment appears impossible. For this reason, I'm personally creating an illusion.

I am an intelligent creature from outer space. The species I belong to can be described as multi-formatted light energies.

My species knows a great deal about alien societies. From our distant planet, we observe the struggles of human beings. To enable us to "keep up with the times" each energy is assigned a current foreign issue to read about and present back to the rest of the energies to inform them of the events of alien happenings.

I have been assigned to the planet: Earth, Continent: North America, State: California, Issue: Affirmative Action Policies, Level: University.

I know this sounds weird, but to enable myself to disconnect my feelings from this assignment, I believe that such a scenario need to be incorporated. Maybe it sounds crazy, but to keep sane while doing this assignment, that is what I am going to do.

Feel free to join me in this illusion. Or feel free to call me a fool. Whatever.

Because of her efforts, students stayed with the listserv assignment, and all but two characterized it favorably; Jammie's response above was typical of the favorable responses. Smitty's and Rachel's were the only two negative responses. Although males had more entries in the debate on this topic on the list, the females were not silenced and, in fact, tried to defuse the conflict by various means. Ironically, Rachel felt the electronic medium curtailed her freedom of speech.

Rachel: I liked the e-mail experience, but I feel like it held me back. The main reason is that I didn't want to offend anyone. When I wrote, I am very cautious about how it will affect other people. Knowing that the e-mail messages were going to be viewed by other people made me nervous. I change my mind about things constantly. My views and thoughts are never stagnant. Consequently, I found it extremely hard to write down anything for fear that I would have to defend my thoughts at that particular time, during a particular day, feeling a particular way. This cowardly presentation of thoughts frustrated me. I have a voice but I use it selectively.

This first example of male-dominated dialogue in Rachel's class (based on total number of entries on affirmative action) showed some of the characteristics described by Deborah Tannen. The black and white males saw each other as adversaries and were trying to maintain the upper hand in the conversations. Note, however, how these entries were relatively long and argued positions. Only Rashaad and Paul became more personal and shorter. The third electronic community I would like to discuss shows another aspect of male-dominated discourse. Tannen shows how men use conflict as a way of being involved with each other. Men want involvement

to avoid isolation but pursue it in the "guise of opposition" (Tannen 25). To many men, conflict is the necessary means by which status is negotiated.

Josh and Kelsey represent Lemon-L in a third class where no single female was the center; instead, these two dominated the listserv, Josh with 109 entries and Kelsey 90. I teased my male colleagues as this semester progressed that the conversations in this class had deteriorated into single-word entries such as, "Me," not grunts exactly, but very close. As Stevens indicated in his paper, "patterns of male language that silence women in the classroom reappear on the network and have the power to alter the nature of the participation....Differing expectations for and uses of language among men and women consistently struggle against each other in the electronic environment" (12, 13). The two entries I've included, Josh's telling of family patterns of violence and Kelsey's raping the rapist, are very different from those of Sarah and Rachel.

Josh: I notice that I have a big difference from most of you, I'm the middle child. I have an older brother and a younger sister, both of which are loud and sometimes violent people. They take after my father, kind of like I do. That is to say that I am also a loud and sometimes violent person, but I have something they don't. I am an extremely patient man. Now, just so you don't get the wrong idea, we don't go around beating people up and breaking everything, we just beat on each other and break our stuff. It's really a bonding experience, I suggest you all try it. I'd have to say being thought of as the patient one has made me a better person simply because I am patient.

Kelsey: Hi All, Mrs. Lemon said that I should start a topic for a change, so here is one that bugs me. People who rape other people are the lowest form of life on this planet and several others too. Rape is not considered serious by many of our so called prosecutors because they are low profile cases. I once read an idea about how to punish a rapist. The idea was to have the rapist raped in the same way as his victim as many times as he or she was raped. Also in this book was the suggestion that a rapist should be charged with indecent exposure because in many states the punishment is higher for this than rape.

Different from the messages of Sarah and Rachel, these two entries were fairly typical of every day messages in class listserv dialogue. What I want to concentrate on here, though, is

how the combative "strings" Josh and Kelsey took over altered the nature of the listserv; in a string, the students include the previous messages along with their response, so the entire exchange is viewed at once on the screen. In one example, Shannon begins with a typical story about lack of sleep. Josh comes in recommending beer as the answer; the conversation progresses until Kelsey enters and then degenerates rapidly.

Shannon: Since I've been at school, my friends on my floor and I have stayed up until at least 1:00 am every night!! I don't intend to stay up that late, we just get to talking and watching tv, and of course studying, but its never early when we go to bed. I know that if I would have gotten this little of sleep in high school, I never would have made it alive through the weeks. I don't know how we do it!! Also, even when I go home from college on some weekends, I am always so dead tired. It seems that when I'm home from school, my body just wants to go to bed at an early time. I should be getting more sleep because the bags are getting harder and harder to cover up, but we do have a lot of fun at night.

Stacey: I know exactly how you feel! I have good intentions of going to bed every night at a decent time. As to date, I haven't reached my goal yet. When I am up so late, I do not do anything useful. I am usually hanging out with friends or watching television. Sometimes, I go check my e-mail at one in the morning. My body has gone into no sleep mode, I guess, because if it was this way in high school, I'd be dead by now.

Josh: All you two need to do is start drinking about 4:00. If you have maybe 10 to 12 beers by 6:30, you should pass out and not wakeup until the next day. Try it!

Stacey: Josh, I don't think you understand...I am trashed after three beers!

Josh: That makes life all the easier, drink about five and pass out. At least it's less expensive. My girlfriend doesn't drink beer, she's a hard liquor woman. Talk about expensive!

Melissa: Shannon, I know exactly what you mean!! There is so much to do other than sleeping at night. I never get to sleep earlier than after one and I feel like I am such a B**** to everyone. If I could only make myself go to be earlier I'm sure I would be a lot happier and more awake in all my boring classes.

Josh: Beer, people, beer.

Kelsey: Listen to Josh, he drops like a tree after just one beer.

Josh: Don't start with me Kelsey. Ever play Beirut?

Kelsey: Yes, I like the Israeli Uzi.

Josh: Bring it on, Wimp! BRING IT ON!!!!

The end of another string actually sounds even more like adolescent locker room talk including phrases very similar to "mine's bigger than yours."

Adam: I have not been having very good luck at trying to find a woman. It seems to me that they are a lot like parking spaces; the good ones are all taken and the rest of them are handicapped. This really sucks because every time I see a really good looking ag student, I start asking around and I find out that she is taken. Its like trying to find a parking space at Wall-mart on Christmas eve: impossible. Just once, I would like to meet a really nice girl and find out that she is not taken and that she actually likes me.

Kelsey: Gee, Adam, maybe you should try to be a gentleman and treat ladies with the respect they deserve instead of comparing them to a parking space. Try to compare them to the stars or a sunset. Be nice and good things can happen. Be an ass and you are the few who besmirch the reputation of the rest of us.
P.S. I do have a girlfriend, a very cute one.

Josh: Your mom doesn't count, Kelsey.

Kelsey: Yes, but your mom does!

Josh: I know you're not sleeping with my mother because she prefers her men have something in the genital area, in which you are lacking.
P.S. I apologize for the bluntness of this message, but the truth hurts.

This confrontational male-dominated discussion did have a negative impact on the class, with fewer A's and B's on the listserv assignment and lower class averages than the other two classes. After this exchange, I stepped in "as teacher," power figure, owner of the list and forbade Josh and Kelsey to respond to each other; I had been advised when I was in the middle of the affirmative action controversy, to remind the students that I had the grade book. I didn't then, but I did with Josh and Kelsey.² Kelsey told me just recently that the two just went off the list and continued the verbal conflict.

I want you to note that the one-up, one-down interaction was still going on between these two even at the end of the semester. To begin preparation for the students' essay exploring values/ethics, I ask them to define the word *value* and describe the way their values have been influenced by their parents' values. The four students' responses to the same prompt which I use at the end of the semester are typical of the patterns I observed and have been discussing in this article: Sarah, values based on experience; Rachel, the complexity of values as walls; Kelsey value for my dollar; and Josh, an indirect putdown of Kelsey's response as he praises his family.

Sarah: My parents values have influenced me a lot. My parents are very against fighting. Over the 27 years they've been married, they've had a total of two fights (that I'm aware of). They've also shown us not to get angry. I've seen my father angry once. I was about seven at the time, and it really scared me. I've seen him frustrated a lot, but he never uses physical violence to solve the problem. He always lets himself have time to calm down and then talks to the person about the problem. My parents have taught me how to work things out without violence. I believe I am much happier and healthier because of them.

Rachel: When I think of the word value I think of walls. Once you put values on things you put them into categories: right and wrong, good and bad, etc... When you put things into categories, you separate them. This separation lays down the first bricks in building a wall of some sort.

My mother has her own set of values.
My father has his own set of values.
My sisters have their own set of values.
I have my own set of values.

You must choose:

Do you wish to see (perceive) nothing, or do you want to see things as they really are?

It is not hard to see things as they really are, it is simply a matter of tearing down the walls, ridding oneself of defense and presumption, rendering oneself vulnerable, an idiot, a fool.

But it is not easy to see things as they really are, because it is painful, it is real, it requires response, it's an incredible commitment.

To go nine-tenths of the way is to suffer at every moment utter madness.

To go all the way is to become sane.

Kelsey: When the word value comes to mind it means value for my dollar. By that I mean if I am spending money I want to spend it on something that I think I need or want.

My family values are that hard work brings a reward that sort of passed me by some days. We also have a value that is hard to find today of family and persons that means so much to us. We also have a value that is hard to find today of loyalty to friends. My family's values are numerous, but they all revolve around the old-fashioned ideas of a gentleman and a lady with modern twists thrown in.

My family values have influenced my behavior by that I believe in being a gentleman whenever possible, but I tend to slip back to annoying because I used it to wake people up when I was young. So my family values make me behave decently to all those who return the behavior.

Josh: When I think of value, I think of my family and friends, mainly because they are the most important people in the world to me. I would do anything for the people I love, because they are so valuable to me. I remember reading other people's entries about how value is money and how much it's worth, and I have to say I disagree very strongly with them. I'm not saying I don't like having money but I like to look at it this way. I can be broke, like I am now, and still survive, but I can't lose my family and still expect to go on. I've always considered people as the most important aspect of my life, and frankly, life would just suck without my girlfriend around.

These four responses, written close to the end of the semester in three separate sections of the same first-year English course, illustrate the patterns I have been observing throughout this article. Sarah responds to the prompt subjectively by looking at her parents' values and finding an illustration of her father's way of dealing with frustration without violence. Rachel sees only the impossibility of coming up with a simple response to the prompt; she again makes the members of the class see the complexity of the issues: "It is not hard to see things as they really are, it is simply a matter of tearing down the walls, ridding oneself of defense and presumption, rendering oneself vulnerable, an idiot, a fool."

Kelsey explains toward the end of his response that he has been used to being "annoying" because he used it "to wake people up" when he was younger. He implies that he is only decent to those who are behaving the way he expects them to based on his family values of hard work and spending money on what he needs and wants. Josh, in the guise of praising his own family

values, takes one last opportunity to disagree with Kelsey about the value of money. The conflict between the two became more subtle and, yes, more typical of classroom talk.

It would be tempting to end here by focusing on the negative exchange between Josh and Kelsey and say that I had found exactly what I had expected to find in male-dominated discourse. Kelsey is currently in my sophomore class and has overwhelmed me with how much he has matured since these interchanges. Would he participate the same way now; he says not. Remember that crowded electronic closet I was talking about at the beginning of this article? This semester I added two more classes to my study, found a male-centered electronic community using the definition of sheer number of entries that was much more like Sarah's than Josh and Kelsey's. Keith's exchange with Danielle, who has been complaining about the cold, is representative.

Keith: Use an afghan, they are very warm. My bedroom is in the basement of our house and one afghan is all I need to stay warm in the winter.

Danielle: No offense, but I have to know what an afghan is to use one!

Keith: How come I keep coming up with all these things no one has ever heard of? An afghan is a big heavy blanket that is knitted with yarn. They are usually hand made and very colorful. My grandma makes a lot of them and they are very warm on a bed.

Danielle: Does your grandmother sell them?

Keith: She usually gives them away. She only makes them because it keeps her occupied during the day or at night when grandpa is watching a ball game.

Keith is responding in a more subjective way in this example; this method of responding encouraged others in the class as well. Although Keith clearly predominated with 242 entries, two women in the class had over one hundred entries.

Finally, I want remind you of the fifth characteristic that Lester Faigley mentioned in his 1989 presentation: no closure. Have I even answered the three questions I posed at the beginning

of this article? Yes, I can clearly see traditionally acknowledged patterns of male-dominated or female-dominated discourse in these electronic communities. Only once would I say males dominated, and their "ritual combat" had a negative impact on the list and on the class's grades as a whole. But I can't end with that. I do want to continue my study of the many examples of uncharacteristic gendered discourse, such as Keith's and Michelle's, in my closet. I have to conclude instead with Sarah and emphasize how her electronic discourse community provided a way to give her inner voice expression; if I come back to the ideas about women's ways of knowing again, e-mail helped her translate her private experience into shared public language. Electronic discourse communities provide a place for her/stories to have equal weight with his/stories.

1. I transcribed all student entries from printed e-mail messages and ran spellcheck but made no other grammatical changes. All students signed permission forms allowing me to use their writings without last names for study and publication; each student had the option of choosing a pseudonym, but most opted to have me use their real first names.
2. Linda Brodkey, speaking on campus, discussed the difficulties of finding suitable reading materials to use affirmative action as a topic for argumentation. We discussed the dialogue which was currently on Lemon-L and which I have referenced in this article; she was one of many colleagues who became interested in this particular electronic conflict and offered suggestions such as reminding the students who had the grade book.

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Appendix

Sarah: Hi. In my free time, sometimes I like to write. I'm going to put something on here that I wrote. It's kind of long, so if you don't have time to read it right now, don't worry. Just skip on to your next message. But when you get the time, could you maybe send me your comments, questions, suggestions, etc?

All My Fault

It's been four years, yet still I can not trust. I can not feel love. I can never live a "normal" life. Why did he have to take all that away from me? A freshman in high school. Only fourteen years old. I just don't understand how in one night, all the things your parents taught you can just be taken away by one careless person. One careless soul. If I could, I would take back that cold winter's night. I would happily just have stayed in my bedroom watching television on a Friday night than have gone out with him. How could he just take away my life, my beliefs, my soul? And for what did I go out with him? For love, for popularity, for a life. But all he ever did was to take away my ability to love, to want to be popular, to want to live. But I lived, darn it. Some days, I wish I hadn't. Especially those days when a wonderful, caring man tries to share his love, his trust, his life with me, but all I can do is pull away, because I'll never be able to share my love, my trust, or my life with anyone else just because of one night. One horrible, stupid night.

I blame myself for letting him take it all away from me. It's all my fault. Everyone was right. I deserved it. It was because of the way I was dressed or the way I acted, or maybe I did something else, but everyone was right. It was all my fault.

I should never have gotten into that car with him that night. Our first date. My first date. It shouldn't have happened that way at all. He should have been on time. He should have come in and met my parents. He should have taken me out on a night to remember.

Well, he did give me a night to remember. No matter how hard I try to forget, or how much I talk about it, I can never forget that night. Because of that one night, I'll never have a normal relationship. I'll always be in some fucked up deal where I get screwed over, but it will always be my fault. I'll never remember the joy I had singing. He took it away from me. He was the last person I ever sang with in front of an audience. I'll never be able to do it ever again because of that one night.

I'll never be able to love a man with all my heart and all my soul, because he took it all away. Only an hour. A short piece of history. Yet he took it all away. Never to be found again.

Because of that night, I have done many stupid things that were all my fault. I did drugs. He showed me how, but it was all my fault. I was alcoholic. He gave me the wine and made me drink it, but it was all my fault. He told me I was fat. For him, I went on a diet and lost forty-five pounds. One third of my body weight. Gone. And then, I lost more. My fault. It was all my fucking fault.

I want that night of my life back. I want the hour that I made myself look better back. I want the two hours that I waited for him to pick me up back. I want the hour that he stole to beat and rape me back. I want my life back. I want to be able to love a man and not have violent flashbacks. I want to love. I want to be able to trust a man, but here I still sit in seclusion with my door locked, my windows shut, and my curtains drawn. I want to have a normal life.

I look at the girls around me, and in envy, I wish I could be like them. I wish I could have good memories of high school like they do. I wish I could love a man like they can. I wish I could trust a man like they can. But no. I'll never be able to do that. He took all that away from me. And it was all...my...fault.

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